

# Responding to Major Incidents - Best Practices Analysis

Prepared by WSDOT and WSP

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**Introduction:** This analysis of best practices for responding to major incidents (those lasting over 90 minutes) has been prepared in response to Governor Gregoire's request at the January 14, 2010, GMAP forum on Changing Strategies. The best practices that have been identified are based on recommendations by federal agencies and national organizations. In addition to the findings reported here, the analysis will be used to help support a more detailed examination of a representative sample of major incidents on Washington state highways, which will focus on the length of response and clearance components, interdependencies between components, factors influencing response and clearance times, lessons learned, and opportunities to improve performance. This additional information, as well as a report on actions being taken to speed up clearance of major incidents, will be reported in the next Transportation GMAP quarterly report in July 2010.

**Key Findings:** WSDOT and WSP operate robust incident response programs that utilize nationally-recognized best practices. During the course of the analysis, several improvement opportunities were identified including: 1) reinstating regular multi-agency meetings to strengthen incident response partnerships, communications, collaboration, and cooperation on a statewide and regional basis ; 2) evaluating potential improvements to the use of technology to facilitate rapid and coordinated response, including interoperable communications, traffic control, investigations, and traveler information; 3) emphasizing the importance of de-briefing meetings to review actions taken and areas for improvements; and 4) refining data collection and analysis.

## INCIDENT RESPONSE BEST PRACTICES ON WASHINGTON STATE HIGHWAYS <sup>1</sup>

Best Practice	Currently Employed?	Comments
1. Develop cross-agency partnerships	Yes	Partnerships have been established between WSDOT, WSP, Department of Ecology, Association of Fire Chiefs, the Tow Truck Operators Association, Coroners, and other emergency responders. A formal Joint Operations Policy Statement (JOPS) between WSDOT and WSP can be found at: <a href="http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/49486131-1579-43D6-999E-77862905DCE7/0/JOPS08.pdf">http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/NR/rdonlyres/49486131-1579-43D6-999E-77862905DCE7/0/JOPS08.pdf</a>
2. Provide multi-disciplinary statewide and regional coordination and training across agencies	Partial	The Washington Incident Management Coalition (WATIMCo) was created in 2007 to facilitate coordination and training. (see <a href="http://www.watimcoalition.org/">http://www.watimcoalition.org/</a> ). The coalition sponsors regular statewide conferences and trainings. Currently dialog is occurring to determine future direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the National Traffic Incident Management Coalition's National Unified Goal for traffic incident management.  
<http://www.transportation.org/sites/ntimc/docs/NUG%20Unified%20Goal-Nov07.pdf>

Best Practice	Currently Employed?	Comments
3. Develop performance measures and goals, and measure progress.	Partial	WSDOT and WSP have established a mutual goal of safely clearing highway traffic incidents within 90 minutes. Progress toward this goal is tracked quarterly and reported to the Governor. WSDOT and WSP work closely to coordinate and reconcile data between information systems. A more detailed examination of a sample of major incidents (as mentioned earlier), will provide additional insight into data availability and coordination.
4. Utilize best-available technology to facilitate rapid and coordinated response and clearance, including communications, traffic control, investigations and traveler information.	Partial	Incident response personnel are centrally dispatched by WSP, and responder communications are coordinated between WSDOT Traffic Management Centers and WSP Communications Centers. WSDOT traffic cameras are used to detect and verify incidents, and variable message signs and other traveler information systems (511, website) are used to notify travelers of incidents. WSP is using SECTOR (electronic ticket and collision reporting) to expedite on-scene data capture and sharing, and is using photogrammetry to expedite some investigations. Expanded use of ITS, SECTOR, and other technologies should be examined with the goal of expediting clearance and increasing safety.
5. Develop effective traffic incident management policies.	Yes	See #1.
6. Promote awareness of the public's role in safe and efficient resolution of incidents.	Yes	Information on driving safely in the vicinity of an incident is provided in the Washington's drivers guide. WATIMCo, the Traffic Safety Commission and AAA are involved in similar efforts. In addition, WSDOT's incident management website provides comprehensive information on work zone offenses, traffic control devices, work zone safety driving tips, and the "Give Em a Brake" program. This information is available at: <a href="http://wsdot.wa.gov/Safety/WorkZones/driversed.htm">http://wsdot.wa.gov/Safety/WorkZones/driversed.htm</a>
7. Develop practices for responder safety and traffic control at incident scenes	Yes	There are many examples of this work, including the JOPS agreement, training by WATIMCo, and incident response procedures manuals published by WSDOT and WSP.
8. Enact legislation to require drivers to move over and slow down when approaching incident responders and vehicles	Yes	RCW 46.61.212 requires drivers entering incident zones to proceed with caution and yield the right-of-way by making a lane change or moving away from the lane or shoulder occupied by the authorized emergency vehicle or police vehicle.
9. Teach drivers how to react to emergencies on the roadway to prevent secondary incidents, and responder injuries and deaths	Yes	See #6. There is also a national program dedicated to this purpose – <i>Turning Point : Roadway Work Zone Safety for New Drivers</i> - sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration, AAA, the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, and the National Safety Council.
10. Adopt multidisciplinary procedures for coordination of incident management operations.	Yes	See #'s 1-5 and #7.

Best Practice	Currently Employed?	Comments
11. All responder disciplines, including state, local, and private sector, should commit to achievement of incident response goals.	Yes	See #'s 3 & #7. In addition, the JOPS agreement provides an overall guide for developing shared goals.
12. Incident responders should be available 24/7	Yes	Responders and resources are available 24/7 on both scheduled and call-out basis. In addition, WSDOT has established the Instant Tow and Blok-Buster Major Incident Tow Programs to expedite clearance. Additional information can be found at: <a href="http://wsdot.wa.gov/Operations/IncidentResponse/initiatives.htm">http://wsdot.wa.gov/Operations/IncidentResponse/initiatives.htm</a>
13. Responders should develop and implement standardized multidisciplinary communications practices and procedures	Yes	See #4
14. Responders should receive prompt, reliable notification of incidents	Yes	See #'s 1 & 4
15. Responders should work together to develop interoperable voice and data networks	Partial	See #'s 1 & 4. This work is ongoing as part of the state's interoperability communication strategies.
16. Responders should work together to reduce the barriers to integrated broadband emergency communications	Yes	See #'s 1 & 4. This work is ongoing as part of the state's interoperability communication strategies.
17. Incident management partners should develop prompt and reliable traveler information systems to help drivers make travel decisions taking incidents into account	Yes	See #4
18. Incident responders should work with news media to provide prompt, reliable incident information to the public	Yes	See #4